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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HAMILTON PRESENTS CREDENTIALS

¶1. Ambassador John R. Hamilton presented credentials to President Alfonso Portillo in a ceremony at the National Palace on the morning of January 8, 2003.

¶2. Following his presentation of Credentials, Ambassador Hamilton made the following statement to the press:

In the course of the ceremony in which I presented my credentials, I expressed to President Portillo my determination to take every opportunity to support Guatemala in the construction of a more democratic, more peaceful, and more prosperous future for the Guatemalan people.

Our countries have a long history of close cooperation in promoting our mutual interests and in meeting the challenges we share. I declared to President Portillo my desire to see that the ties of cooperation that link our countries not only continue, but become stronger and deeper.

Today is an apt time to reflect upon the relationship between the United States and Guatemala, because negotiations begin today for a free trade agreement between the United States and Central America. This agreement offers a new opportunity for our peoples. Free trade brings greatest benefits to countries that have an environment of transparency and respect for the rule of law. I sincerely hope the Government of Guatemala will undertake more concrete actions to respond to these challenges in the coming months.

HAMILTON